



GALE Gospel of Life

According to Pope Francis

Throughout his ministry as archbishop and pope, the Holy Father has issued a clarion call to affirm life.

During his 15 years as archbishop of Buenos Aires and his 10 months as Pope Francis, Jorge Mario Bergoglio has consistently defended the dignity of human life from the moment of conception to natural death. In the face of what Pope Francis has called the “throwaway culture” of our times, a recurring theme in his teaching has been concern for the most vulnerable and defenseless human beings, including children — born and unborn — the disabled, and the elderly. While he made it clear in a widely publicized interview that “it is not necessary to talk about these issues all the time,” it is equally clear that Pope Francis has not hesitated to speak out time and again about the crucial task of building a culture of life.

In the following pages, *Columbia* presents excerpts from some key pro-life statements by Cardinal Bergoglio-Pope Francis.

CRYING OUT TO THE LORD

The Holy Father [John Paul II] warns us that “nowadays a model of society appears to be emerging in which the powerful predominate, setting aside and even eliminating the powerless: I am thinking here of unborn children, helpless victims of abortion; the elderly and incurably ill, subjected at times to euthanasia; and the many other people relegated to the margins of society by consumerism and materialism. ... This model of society bears the stamp of the culture of death, and is therefore in opposition to the Gospel message. Faced with this distressing reality, the Church community intends to commit itself all the more to the defense of the culture of life” (*Ecclesia in America*, 63). ...

We are like Peter that night on the lake: On the one hand, the presence of the Lord encourages us to accept and face the waves of these challenges; on the other hand, the environment of self-sufficiency and arrogance — pure pride — that this culture of death is creating threatens us, and we are afraid of sinking in the midst of the storm. The Lord is there: We believe it with the certainty that the power of the Holy Spirit gives to us. And, in defiance of the Lord, there is the muffled scream of countless unborn children: this daily genocide, silent and protected. There is also the cry of the dying ones who have been abandoned and who are begging for a tender caress that this culture of death cannot give. And there is the multitude of families reduced to shreds by the proposals of consumerism and materialism. In the midst of this conflict and in the presence of Jesus Christ in glory, united today as the faithful people of God, we cry like Peter did when he began to sink, “Lord, save me” (Mt 14:30), and we stretch out our hand to grasp the only One who can give true meaning to our going into the waves.

— *Meeting of Latin American politicians and legislators, Aug. 3, 1999.*

“EVERY CHILD WHO,
RATHER THAN BEING
BORN, IS CONDEMNED
UNJUSTLY TO BEING
ABORTED, BEARS THE FACE
OF JESUS CHRIST.”

PUBLIC RESPONSIBILITY

The [*Aparecida*] document asks governments, regulators and health care providers to defend the inalienable value of life, and to encourage conscientious objection in the face of laws or government regulations that are unjust in the light of faith and reason. This is a matter of “eucharistic consistency,” which means “to be conscious that they cannot receive holy Communion and at the same time act with deeds or words against the commandments, particularly when abortion, euthanasia and other grave crimes against life and the family are encouraged. This responsibility weighs particularly over legislators, heads of governments and health professionals” (436). ...

I want to focus in particular on two stages of life that I consider essential for the growth in peace of different generations: childhood and old age. They are the two extremes of life, and they are the most vulnerable and the most forgotten. A society that abandons its children and eliminates its elderly is mortgaging its future.

— *Article titled “The Family in the Light of the Aparecida Document” (Familia et Vita, 2008).*

SIGNS OF HOPE

We are aware that the tragedy of our time is the split between the Gospel and culture. Families, institutions and society in general are unable to find new ways of sustaining themselves and growing. In our country, we are faced with the loss of values that are at the root of our identity, with the resulting risk of the unraveling of our social fabric. ...

In spite of such social fragmentation, fundamental values endure in our homeland: the battle for life from conception to natural death; the defense of human dignity; the ability to appreciate freedom, constancy and concern for the demands of justice; the effort to educate children well; esteem for the family, friendship and affection; and a sense of celebration and popular creativity that does not give up but seeks to firmly resolve difficult situations in daily life. All these are signs of hope that encourage us to proclaim Jesus Christ as we seek new ways to transmit the faith, a transmission so battered by the crisis described above.

— *Address during the “Ad Limina” Visit to His Holiness Benedict XVI, March 14, 2009.*

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ON EUTHANASIA AND ABORTION

Our morality also says that one has to do what is necessary and ordinary, in those cases where the end is foreseeable. Quality of life must be ensured. The strength of medicine, in terminal cases, is not so much about making someone live another three days or three months, but rather in making sure the body suffers as little as possible. One is not obligated to



Pope Francis greets pilgrims with disabilities and senior citizens after celebrating Mass for “*Evangelium Vitae*” Day June 16, 2013. The day called attention to care for the aged, the unborn, the sick and those with disabilities.

conserve life with extraordinary methods, which at times can go against the dignity of the person. But active euthanasia is different — this is killing. I believe that today there is covert euthanasia: Our social security pays up until a certain amount of treatment and then says, “may God help you.” The elderly are not taken care of as they should be, but rather are treated like discarded material. Sometimes they are deprived of medicine and ordinary care, and little by little this kills them. ...

The moral problem with abortion is of a pre-religious nature because the genetic code of the person is present at the moment of conception. This means that a human being already exists. I separate the issue of abortion from any religious concept. It is a scientific problem. To not allow further progress in the development of a being that already has the entire genetic code of a human being is not ethical. The right to life is the first human right. Abortion means killing someone who cannot defend himself.

— *Book of conversations in 2010 between Cardinal Bergoglio and Rabbi Abraham Skorka, titled Sobre el Cielo y la Tierra (On Heaven and Earth).*

SAVING TWO LIVES

With respect to the [veto of the] non-punishable abortion law in Buenos Aires, we sense once again that we are deliberately moving toward the limitation and elimination of the supreme value of life and ignoring the rights of unborn children. When

talking about a pregnant mother, we are talking about two lives. Both must be preserved and respected, because life has an absolute value. ...

Abortion is never a solution. For our part, we must listen, support and understand in order to save two lives: to respect the smallest and most defenseless human being, to adopt measures to preserve his life, to allow him to be born and then to be creative in finding ways that will lead to his full development.

— *Message regarding the approval of the law on non-punishable abortions, Sept. 9, 2012.*

SAYING “YES” TO LIFE

All too often, as we know from experience, people do not choose life, they do not accept the “Gospel of Life” but let themselves be led by ideologies and ways of thinking that block life, that do not respect life, because they are dictated by selfishness, self-interest, profit, power and pleasure, and not by love, by concern for the good of others. It is the eternal dream of wanting to build the city of man without God, without God’s life and love — a new Tower of Babel. ...

Dear brothers and sisters, let us look to God as the God of Life, let us look to his law, to the Gospel message, as the way to freedom and life.... Let us say “Yes” to life and not death. Let us say “Yes” to freedom and not enslavement to the many idols of our time. In a word, let us say “Yes” to the God who

is love, life and freedom, and who never disappoints. ... Let us ask Mary, Mother of Life, to help us receive and bear constant witness to the "Gospel of Life."

— Homily for "Evangelium Vitae" Day, June 16, 2013.

CALLED TO BE WITNESSES

A widespread mentality of the useful, the "throwaway culture" that today enslaves the hearts and minds of so many, comes at a very high cost: It asks for the elimination of human beings, especially if they are physically or socially weaker. Our response to this mentality is a decisive and unreserved "yes" to life. ... Things have a price and can be sold, but people have dignity; they are worth more than things and are above price. So often we find ourselves in situations where we see that what is valued the least is life. That is why concern for human life in its totality has become in recent years a real priority for the Church's Magisterium, especially for the most defenseless (i.e., the disabled, the sick, the newborn, children, the elderly, those whose lives are most defenseless).

In a frail human being, each one of us is invited to recognize the face of the Lord, who in his human flesh experienced the indifference and solitude to which we so often condemn the poorest of the poor, whether in developing countries or in wealthy societies. Every child who, rather than being born, is condemned unjustly to being aborted, bears the face of Jesus Christ, bears the face of the Lord, who even before he was born, and then just after birth, experienced the world's rejection. ... And every elderly person, even if he is ill or at the end of his days, bears the face of Christ. They cannot be discarded, as the "throwaway culture" suggests! They cannot be thrown away! ...

Be witnesses and diffusers of the "culture of life." Your being Catholic entails a greater responsibility: first of all to yourselves, through a commitment consistent with your Christian vocation; and then to contemporary culture, by contributing to recognizing the transcendent dimension of human life, the imprint of God's creative work, from the first moment of its conception. This is a task of the new evangelization that often

requires going against the tide and paying for it personally. The Lord is also counting on you to spread the "Gospel of Life."

— Address to the International Federation of Catholic Medical Associations, Sept. 20, 2013.

THE FOUNDATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Among the vulnerable for whom the Church wishes to care with particular love and concern are unborn children, the most defenseless and innocent among us. Nowadays efforts are made to deny them their human dignity and to do with

them whatever one pleases, taking their lives and passing laws preventing anyone from standing in the way of this. Frequently, as a way of ridiculing the Church's effort to defend their lives, attempts are made to present her position as ideological, obscurantist and conservative. Yet this defense of unborn life is closely linked to the defense of each and every other human right. It involves the conviction that a human being is always sacred and inviolable, in any situation and at every stage of development. Human beings are ends in themselves and never a means of resolving other problems. Once this conviction disappears, so do solid and lasting foundations for the defense of human rights, which would always be subject to the passing whims of the powers that be. Reason alone is sufficient to recognize the inviolable value of each single human life, but if we also look at the issue



Pope Francis blesses the unborn baby of actress Ali Landry and her husband Alejandro Monteverde, director of the pro-life film *Bella*, at the Vatican April 11, 2013.

from the standpoint of faith, "every violation of the personal dignity of the human being cries out in vengeance to God and is an offense against the creator of the individual" (*Christifideles Laici*, 37).

— Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Nov. 24, 2013.

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